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THE HOUSEKEEPER AND THE COST OF LIVING

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I have been greatly interested in the question of the effects of coöperation throughout the farming community on the cost of living; and there is one coöperation not particularly emphasized to which I should like to call attention. The questions of farm labor, of machinery, of investment to make the soil productive have all been considered from a business standpoint in order to determine how much of an investment is reasonable to bring good returns. A large percentage of the incomes derived from the business of farming is spent for the farm home. Moreover, the farm woman is related not only to the problems of consumption but to the problems of production as well. It is a business partnership which does not exist in other homes. The up-to-date farmer earns his money under approved methods of work; old machinery has been discarded as uneconomic and farm labor has been reduced to stated hours as in other occupations. In the other side of the partnership where preparation and consumption occur, equipment has been slow to change, hours of labor are uncertain except that they are sure to be long and women are generally working in an uneconomic way. Further, business methods as regards bookkeeping and division of income are applied only to methods of production and not to preparation for consumption. As a result, the worker in the home has become discouraged, labor is difficult to find, the cost of living is not estimated and much energy is wasted.

The problems of production are being solved under intelligent and scientific training. Work has become interesting because of these standards. Young men are encouraged to engage in farming because of its financial advantages. The other side of the partnership in which the farm home figures until recently has not required a scientific knowledge of the questions of nutrition, sanitation and household management. As a result a greater stress is laid upon

raising good wheat than making good bread, upon feeding animals for efficiency than upon feeding man for efficiency. There is a large efficiency waste because of poor food, unsanitary surroundings and mismanaged incomes.

To change these conditions requires coöperation in education by which girls as well as boys will be prepared for their work in life; it means as good labor saving devices for house work as for farm work; as happy a frame of mind toward labor in the house as toward work outside; as much need of recreation in the one case as in the other.

No labor will be dignified unless it is raised out of the menial by intelligence and skill. Until training is given to the worker the task will be menial because it is done in a menial way. A changed attitude of housekeepers toward their work and of the world toward the housekeeper who has selected this work as a means of earning a living, will do much to settle the domestic problem. As long as the housekeeper is unwilling to use her hands and takes little pride in her work her maid will be looked upon as a menial in the family and her daughter will select any kind of work except housework as a means of earning a living. Still men must be fed, clothed and cared for and the expense of this is increasing as our tastes become more complex and help becomes scarcer.

The principles of education applied to housework are as necessary in town and city as on the farm. The business man spends a large share of his income to maintain his home. Under present conditions many business men must remain on the verge of poverty or remain unmarried because of unbusinesslike methods in house work and ignorance in the conservation of time, strength and money.

To remedy this we must educate girls for the work which they are intended to do. The men and women will meet the problems of living whether married or not. The consumer who selects his food at a restaurant is in as much need of good food even though she earns her living as a stenographer as the woman who provides her table. All women, therefore, should have a knowledge of food, shelter and clothing. It is a knowledge not to be denied men who are the earners and the spenders as well.

Education for culture is not to be discouraged. The application of science and art to food, shelter and clothing is surely not less cultural than the study of science, art and economics without knowing for what they are to be used except to cultivate the mind. Thou-

sands of women go away from the high school and college to spend incomes without any knowledge or direction whatever to enable them to do it wisely. This is as absurd as for men to expect to earn incomes without any knowledge of bookkeeping or of business methods. A large waste of income comes from the lack of understanding, and coöperation between the earners and the spenders. The chivalrous man in trying to protect the woman whom he would support is troubled by not having an understanding with his partner. She suffers with him from living beyond their means when all might be avoided by proper understanding of how much there is to spend and for what it should be spent.

New types of art keep the spender forever trying to keep up with the procession. Unless educated to it she does not know the sham from the real and must depend upon the clerk who has learned hackneyed expressions in order to sell goods. In all walks of life imitation is costly. The more prosperous set the standard and other classes imitate regardless of results. This has led to an increased demand for the useless and oftentimes an extravagant attitude toward the useful.

While men are continually studying to increase the income, women may do as much toward controlling expenditures by better choice of clothing, better preparation of food, smaller waste through the garbage pail, buying in larger quantities when it is possible, insisting on accurate weights and measures and upon better construction of stoves, ovens and more useful labor saving devices.